

ANCIENT ALCHEMY—Part II

RIG VEDA RITUAL SEEKS FERTILITY FOR 1,100 COUPLES

Our coverage of this mass metaphysical test case for a Veda rite continues from July.

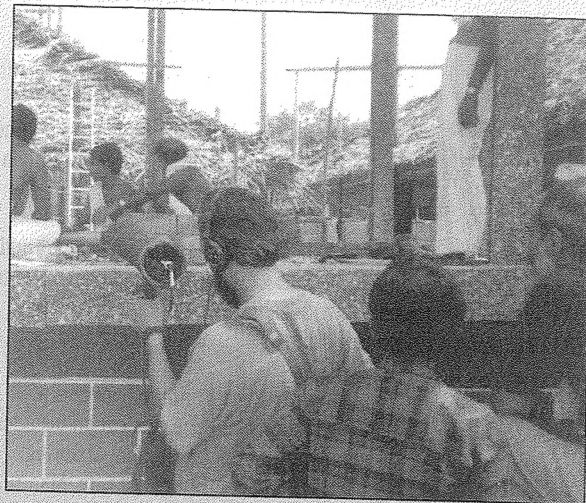
Reported by C.S.H.N Murthy

It is May in Kerala, the emerald green and waterwayed state on the western coast of South India. It is a land of matriarchy, Hindu martial arts, Adi Shankara's birthplace, cinnamon and clove plantations. And communism—now starting to evaporate here like jungle dew in the new world order. Krishna worship is vital, and Christianity is very old and pervasive. Somewhere off the coast of Kerala the American and Indian navies were scheduled for joint maneuvers. A breeze blows in off those waters into the city of Cochin and the India, and international press corps and documentary teams are blowing into town, too.

Next to Cochin's Archeology Museum, spread across several acres of grounds are the palmyrah-thatched lodges of what looks like a Vedic ashram time-warped to 1992—

except for the gaudy purple, tiered gate at the compound's entrance, and the ninety stone-faced policemen forming a security gauntlet. It is May 2nd, and an extraordi-

nary *Veda* ritual—and spiritual science—event is unfolding as 1,100 childless couples quietly walk with bare feet into the cavernous Durbar Hall. The ritual is the *Puthrakameshti Yagna*, designed to initiate conception in infertile couples. It is a complicated 8-day homa—fire-and-Sanskrit chanting rite—that seeks a softening of karmic conditions and alters the electro-magnetic properties of water contained in mud pots. There are thirty thousand of these mud pots neatly stacked alongside compound fences—they are the ancient rishi's test tubes. Three times a day during the ceremonies, the couples hoist the charged water over their heads and drop it behind them. This yagna was first outlined in the *Rig Veda* so long ago that Greece and China were not yet civilizations. A rare, post-*Veda* report of its performance occurs in the *Ramayana*, in which it was a success. Over the past months the yagna has been peppery news in India. Women's groups, rationalist societies and even Vedic



International documentary crew take a sound test.

scholars unleashed flaming arrows of criticism into the yagna's thatched abodes. Concerns range from couples seeking sons only, to wasted money, to the sacerdotal techniques for the sketchily described yagna. But none dented the armor of V.S. Ramakrishna Nair, the youthful, thoughtful man behind the fertility yagna. HINDUISM TODAY correspondent C.S.H.N. Murthy toured and talked with Nair.

With an intellectual's glasses and a rishi's beard, Nair (a warrior caste in Kerala) is ar-

ticulate and feisty. He gave an opening one-hour talk that glued the press to their seats, deftly fended off the male chauvinism criticism and cast the whole yagna as a spiritual science experiment. As a capstone, he said 14 couples had conceived just by applying for the yagna. Nair is president of the Center of Astrological Research and Development (CARD), the sponsoring institution of the grand yagna. Half of the money—US\$280,000—for the ceremony came from CARD members' philanthropy. CARD itself was only born in the spring of 1991. Five thousand couples applied from across India. The

1,100 who are here today—not all are Hindu—were chosen by computer and personal medical evaluation done by volunteer doctors. Each couple paid Rs2,000, a meagre amount compared to fertility specialists bills. During the yagna they practice celibacy, eat a vegetarian non-spicy diet, and are not supposed to smoke or drink. CARD warns if they privately overstep these purifications, they risk jeopardizing their chance at conception. The wealthier couples stay in

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